

Whose Fault Is Our Temptation?--Part 1

Introduction

James 1:14 begins with these words: "Every man is tempted." All of us can give testimony to the truthfulness of that statement. Everyone is tempted. Temptation is the common experience of every human being, whether they are Christian or not.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that temptations are "common to man." One ancient writer said that even when we are saved, we must remember that our baptism did not drown our flesh. How we deal with the battle of temptation is another mark of the genuineness of our faith or our lack of it.

A. The Qualification Regarding Temptations

James makes a sudden change from verse 12 to 13: he has been referring to trials with the Greek noun peirasmos and now uses the same word to refer to temptations.

The trials that the Lord allows into our lives to strengthen us can also become temptations, which, rather than being a means to spiritual growth, can become a solicitation to evil. Every difficult thing that comes into my life either strengthens me because I obey God and stay confident in His care and power, or leads me to doubt God and disobey His Word. The difference between a trial and a temptation is how you respond to it. Every trial has the potential to become a temptation.

B. The Question About Temptations

1. Asked

We are thus faced with a decision: will we obediently persevere in trials, or will we listen to the voice that suggests the easy way out is disobedience? If we fall into sin, whose fault is it? Is it God's fault for allowing the trials?

Is it His fault for having created us the way we are? Is it the fault of our circumstances? The issue of who is to blame for temptation is the heart of this passage. It is an age-old question.

2. Answered

Although it is an ancient belief that God is responsible for our temptation and sin, James forbids such a thought. In fact, he implies that someone who intimately knows God grieves over his sin and readily confesses it, and therefore wouldn't think of blaming God for it.

James warns against rationalizing our sin and blaming God in the midst of our battle against temptation. "Let no one say" is in the middle voice in the Greek text and could be translated, "Let no one say to himself" or "let no one excuse himself."

When you are fighting temptation and near to yielding, don't make the excuse that you are being tempted by God.

The Greek preposition in the phrase translated "tempted of God" is not hupo, the preposition of direct agency, referring to whomever is the direct cause of something; it is apo, a preposition of origin conveying the idea of remoteness. Assuming that no one would accuse God of directly causing him to sin, James is saying that we should not even think of God as the remote origin of our temptation, the ultimate cause of our sins. Most men don't go as far as to see God as the direct tempter, but they do feel God is indirectly to blame by having permitted the situation and the possibility of failure. So God is not the near agency of temptation, nor is He even its remote cause. Don't ever look at yourself as a victim of God's providence.

To support that exhortation in verse 13, James gives us four proofs in verse 13-17 showing why God is not responsible for temptation or sin.

I. THE NATURE OF EVIL (v. 13)

"Let no man say when he is, tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

A. The Stated Contrast

The Greek translated "cannot be tempted" implies that God is inexperienced with evil because He has no capacity for it or vulnerability to it. The mention of "evil" without an article refers to the whole realm of evil, none of which is able to penetrate the holy nature of God. All evil repulses God because it stands in opposition to His holiness. Although Scripture is replete with statements of God's holiness (Lev. 19:2; 20:26; Isa. 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:16), perhaps Habakkuk 1:13 is the clearest statement that evil cannot permeate God's holiness: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." So the nature of evil makes it impossible for God to be tempted, or to tempt someone else, which would indicate that He has a delight in seeing someone else do evil. He who knows no evil cannot delight in evil.

B. The Supposed Contradictions

1. The tally by David

Second Samuel 24:1 seems to contradict James 1:13: "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." David committed a sin by numbering his people and trusting in their military might rather than God's. However, 1 Chronicles 21:1 clarifies that "Satan stood up against Israel, and enticed David to number Israel." Satan is accurately identified as the tempter of David. The broader picture Samuel gives is that God allowed it to happen because David had the choice to respond or not respond to the enticement of Satan. And James clarifies that not only is God not directly involved in inciting us to sin, but also He is not even remotely responsible.

2. The testing of Jesus

Matthew 4:1 says the Holy Spirit led Jesus "into the wilderness to be tested by the devil." One might think God was leading Him into temptation, but He wasn't

because none of the tests were temptations designed to lead Jesus into sin. Rather they proved Him to be the Son of God.

3. The teaching on prayer

The request of Matthew 6:13 to "lead us not into temptation" has to do with trials.

It's an emotional plea of the saint who's praying, "God, don't lead me into any trial that is more than I can bear." The Lord's answer is found in 1 Corinthians 10:13, which says, "There hath no temptation [trial] taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make the way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." When we pray, "Lead us not into trials or temptation," we are simply asking God to do what He has already promised to do in never giving us more than we can bear.

God allows temptation to go on, and men like David have to make a choice. But God Himself does not tempt. He allows us to be tested, even as He allowed Christ to be tested. But He doesn't allow more than we are able to bear and provides an avenue of victory that we are free to choose.

II. THE NATURE OF MAN (v. 14)

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

Temptation doesn't come from God but from within. The use of the present tense in the Greek text implies that every person goes through repeated experiences of temptation.

A. The Analogy of Being Trapped

"Drawn away" is used in hunting contexts of animals being lured into traps. "Enticed" is a term used of catching fish and means "to capture" or "to catch with bait." In 2 Peter 2:14 and 18, the latter term is translated "to beguile" and "to allure." Every person is tempted when the trap of sin is baited with that which appeals to our lust. A person's lust responding to an enticing bait deceptively draws him away to the point where he is trapped.

The reason animals are able to be trapped is that the bait is inviting, and the trap or hook is disguised. Instead of the anticipated pleasure of grabbing the bait, they experience the pain of capture and death. Likewise, temptation promises a tasty indulgence as it lures the suckered victim into its deadly trap.

B. The Agency in Being Tempted

What pulls us so strongly to the bait? It's not God. And it's not Satan, his demons, or the world's evil system that entice us to sin, although they bait the hook. It is the lustful nature of man that pulls us to take hold of it. Our flesh, our fallen nature, has a desire for evil.

1. Its individuality

"His own" implies that the nature of lust may be different for each person. One person's passion is another's person's repulsion. I see people who are driven into homosexuality by their lust, but that sin doesn't entice me because I am so repulsed by it. Some temptations are more alluring to us than others.

2. Its identity

"Lust" (Gk., epithumia) refers to the strong desire of the soul to enjoy or acquire something. The use of the preposition upo before the noun indicates that the direct agent of temptation is lust. Lust is the cause of our sinning--not God, and not even the devil, demons, or wicked men. The latter three surrounded Christ through His entire life, yet He never sinned because he had no lust. Nothing put on the hook attracted Him in any way. The problem is not the tempter without--it's the traitor within. Each person's soul has its own patterns of fleshly desire as a result of his environment, upbringing, and personal choices. Man's human nature has the propensity to desire what will satisfy it. And if lured to things outside the will of God, his lust will tempt him to bite the bait and be caught by the hook of sin.

Pogo, the cartoon character, was famous for saying, "We have met the enemy and he is us." From a spiritual perspective the problem is that even though we've been redeemed and have received a new nature, we still have an enemy within. The resident passion of the flesh, not God, is responsible for our being tempted to sin.

III. THE NATURE OF LUST (vv. 15-16)

A. The Explanation (v. 15)

"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

The third reason God is not the source of sin is found in the nature of lust. James shifts metaphors from hunting and fishing to childbirth. He personifies lust resulting in sin as a mother conceiving a child. Most people think of sin as an individual act or behavior. God is saying that sin is not an act; it is the result of a process.

1. The process of lust

a) Desire

Sin starts with lust (Gk., epithumia, "strong desire"). Desire is related to emotion. It is a desire to be satisfied by acquiring something. It may be something you saw in a jewelry store, a car dealership, a shopping mall, or a real-estate office. You have an emotional longing to possess what you saw.

b) Deception

Temptation next affects your mind through deception. You begin to justify and rationalize your right to possess what you desire. Your mind is deceived into believing that fulfilling your lust will satisfy you and meet your need.

c) Design

Next your will gets involved plotting how you're going to get what you want.

The Greek word translated "conceived" (sullamban[ma]o) means "to grasp together" and refers in a technical sense to a woman's taking hold of a man's seed, and thereby conceiving a child. When lust, so to speak, is seduced by the prostitution of that baited hook, it becomes pregnant in the womb of a person's will.

d) Disobedience

Finally the act of sin occurs. Any child that is born follows a similar process.

First there is a desire between husband and wife to have a child. That is followed by the decision to do so and the act of the will in bringing about conception, all of which result in the birth of the child. Temptation follows that sequence until it results in sinful behavior.

The Greek word translated "bringeth forth" (tikt[ma]o) means "to give birth."

Lust gives birth to sin because it influenced the mind to justify sin, and the mind convinced the will to give birth to sinful behavior.

{*}Dealing a Deathblow to Sinful Desires

At what point do we deal with sin? Not at the point of behavior--for that's too late--but at the point of desire. It's the person who is able to control his emotional responses who is able to deal effectively with sin. Or, if the person who is being bombarded by negative emotional responses has a mind that is sanctified, those desires can be deactivated before they can be activated by the will. But once they capture the will, their birth is inevitable. You must deal with lustful emotions if you want to effectively deal with sin in your life. If you expose your emotions to the baited hook, you may find yourself getting hooked unless you take immediate action.{e*}

2. The prevention of lust

So many things in our evil society attempt to work on your emotions: movies, television, books, music, clothing, advertisements--all the alluring sights and sounds that attract our attention are designed to capture the emotion. For example, advertising executives know that buying is ultimately an emotional decision. Few people know or even care about the mechanics of a car being advertised, yet they are impressed by a car that looks like a race car, or by a pretty girl behind the wheel, or by other kinds of emotional bait that has nothing to do with how the car functions.

We need to guard our minds, emotions, and wills, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). We need to seek God's will by meditating on His Word and letting His will become ours. An unprotected, uncontrolled, and unyielded mind is going to be filled with evil desires that will result in evil deeds. So we must control how our emotions and minds respond to the tempting bait they encounter. That's where sin gets started.

In spite of that, emotional responses can be a wonderful blessing if they are expressed in a godly manner. Music elicits primarily an emotional response and Christians have the privilege of receiving and experiencing the emotional enjoyment that comes from hearing and producing music that honors God rather than worldly values. But we cannot continually expose our emotions to that which lures us away from the things of God without paying the price. And because we can't always regulate what our emotions are exposed to, it is necessary for us to have "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), set "on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2), saturated with the "word of Christ" (Col. 3:16), and renewed and able to transform us rather than conform us to the world (Rom. 12:2). We need to love the Lord with all our mind (Mark 12:30). If our minds feed on the Word of God and our emotions are under the Spirit's control, we're going to stop sin before it ever starts. If we fail in those areas, we will conceive sin and carry out unrighteous acts.

3. The product of lust

James says that "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The Greek word translated "bringeth forth" (apakue[ma]o) means "to give birth to." Lust conceives and gives birth to sin, which ultimately brings forth death. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." The kind of death sin results in is spiritual death--the eternal separation of the soul from God. (Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body.)

James is not specifically talking about Christians or non-Christians, but is making the general statement that sin produces death. Although sin in a believer will not result in spiritual death, it can result in physical death (1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16). The hope that you're bringing some satisfying behavior to life by sinning is a lie.

B. The Exhortation (v. 16)

"Do not err, my beloved brethren."

James is saying we're to stop being led astray and deceived. The Greek word translated "err" gives us our English word planet. It refers to something that wanders. James warns us not to wander from the truth by thinking that sin is God's fault and doesn't have consequences. We must not blame God for our sin, but ourselves. We need to realize that we have an enemy within us-- the lust of our fallen human nature. We cannot expose our emotions to everything that lures us and let our minds become captive to those things. We've got to know where the problem is and deal with it at that level. Fill your mind with the things of God so that temptations can never mate with your feelings and conceive sin in your will.

IV. THE NATURE OF GOD (v. 17)

A. His Goodness and Graciousness (v. 17a)

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."

The only things that come from God are good and perfect. God could never produce evil because His nature is good. Rather, He produces unending good. Whereas we

possess a nature that gives rise to sin, God does not. Why would we try to satisfy ourselves with baited hooks that result in death when God is pouring out everything we could ever want for our satisfaction? Only a fool would be lured away by a baited trap when all the goodness of God is available by His grace. Likewise, our flesh can be compared to a well of stagnant water. So it is ludicrous to think we could be satisfied by drinking from it when we can come to the fountain of Living Water Himself who gives us every good and perfect gift.

The double use of "every" and "gift" emphasize the all-inclusiveness of God's graciousness. Two different Greek words are used for "gift." Dosis refers to the act of giving, and d[ma]lor[ma]lema refers to object that is given. Every act of giving on God's part and every gift He gives is sufficient, lacking nothing, beneficial, and complete.

Satan deceived Eve by implying that God was holding out on her and that she better grab what satisfaction she could by eating from the forbidden tree and supposedly becoming like God (Gen 3:1-6). She, along with Adam, believed that lie and the child of sin was conceived and born, bringing forth both spiritual death and physical death for the human race.

B. His Stability and Steadfastness (v. 17b)

"And cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

James called God "the Father of lights." That was an ancient Jewish reference to God as the Creator. The lights referred to are the sun, moon, and stars. James chose that title because it fit his illustration. God created the celestial bodies, but with Him there's no variation or shifting, like there is with them. From our perspective the sun, moon, and stars move, disappear, change in shape, or vary in intensity--their benefit to us coming and going. But God isn't like that. His brilliant light of glory and gracious goodness does not change. God doesn't pass from one condition to another or change like shadows do as the sun moves. His grace never goes dark. First John 1:5 says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Malachi 3:6 says, "I am the Lord, I change not." There are no days when He stops giving to men. The flow of good things from God never varies or stops.

Conclusion

A fish that has eaten takes no bait. So if you're feeding on the divine resources available to every believer, you'll find that the baited hook of temptation holds very little attraction for you. Fill up on divine gifts. Eighteenth century hymnwriter Robert Robinson wrote,

Come, Thou Fount of ev'ry blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.

The streams of God's mercy never cease. Nothing can eclipse His goodness or

stop His benevolence. Knowing that, don't take the devil's bait and give birth to deadly sin. Rather, receive the good that God wants to give you.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Who faces temptation (James 1:14; see p. 1)?
2. What is the difference between a trial and a temptation (see p. 1)?
3. What does James warn us against doing when we experience trials, (James 1:13; see p. 2)?
4. What should we never look at ourselves as a victim of? Why (see p. 2)?
5. Why can't God be tempted with evil? Support your answer with Scripture (see p. 2).
6. Cite some biblical examples that supposedly contradict the fact that God does not tempt us. How can they be resolved (see pp. 2-3)?
7. What promise do we have that God knows the limit of the trials we can handle (see p. 3)?
8. According to James 1:14, where does temptation come from (see p. 3)?
9. What analogies does James allude to in verse 14 to make his point (see p. 3)?
10. Although man's fallen nature has a desire for evil, is every person's lust the same? Explain (see p. 4).
11. How does James personify lust in verse 15 (see p. 4)?
12. Explain the four-step process of how lust leads to sin (see pp. 4-5).
13. At what point should we deal with sin? Why (see p. 5)?
14. How can we guard our minds, emotions, and wills? Support your answer with Scripture (see p. 6).
15. When are emotional responses a wonderful blessing (see p. 6)?
16. What does sin result in? Could that include the believer? Explain (see p. 6).
17. What is it about God's nature that teaches us He would never tempt us to commit evil (v. 17; see p. 7-8)?

Pondering the Principles

1. We tend to justify our sin and blame others for making us commit it. A brief look at Adam's and Eve's response to God about their disobedience reveals that human

trait (Gen. 3:12-13). Our society has so intensified that trait that we tend to take little if any responsibility for our actions. Are you influenced by that kind of thinking? Do you find yourself blaming demons or ungodly people for your sin?

Or, are you sensitive to sin and willing take full responsibility for it as you confess it to the Lord? Meditate on the prayer of confession Daniel offered in Daniel 9. Ask God to enable you to follow Daniel's example of "a broken and a contrite heart" (Ps. 51:17).

2. Sin must be dealt with as soon as your emotions and mind begin lusting for something that is outside the will of God. Satan offered Jesus the glory of ruling "all the kingdoms of the world" (Matt. 4:8- 9), but our Lord was not willing to become subservient to Satan. He knew the promise of Psalm 2:7-8: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Are you lusting for a position, possession, or a perversion that is not in accord to God's timing or will? To stop that illicit desire before it gives birth to sin and chastisement, search God's Word to know His will (Ps. 119:11; Matt. 4:10). Immediately change your course of direction and avoid any situation that might tempt your emotions and allow your mind to justify your sin (Gen. 39:7-12; 2 Timothy 2:22).

Thank the Lord that He can give you victory over temptation and sin as you saturate your mind with His Word and yield yourself to the control of His Spirit.

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